
From a Food Source to a Conduit for Settlement: The Bay During the Struggle for Mexican Independence, Anglo American Colonization, and the Republic of Texas, 1810-1845

Events in the early 19th century brought political changes to Galveston Bay and saw the demise of the native population. Mexican reformers declared their independence from Spain in 1810, but the movement quickly became guerrilla warfare against royal troops while the Spanish viceroy controlled Mexico City until 1821.

Galveston Bay, however, became a staging area for a number of adventurers including Mexican republican sympathizers, privateers, and even a band of Napoleonic refugees hoping to liberate the Emperor from exile on St. Helena Island. While these European and Anglo American filibusters and pirates stayed mainly along the coast, their presence doomed the annual visits to the shore by Karankawas and Orcoquizas.

Military Adventurers and Privateers

In November 1815, Gen. Jean Joseph Amable Humbert and fifty men left New Orleans to join Henry Perry and a group of Anglo American veterans of the War of 1812 on Bolivar Peninsula. They built a fort on a high point, perhaps an ancient shell midden, on the bay side where they spent the winter. They were waiting for supplies and reinforcements in order to attack the Spanish outpost at La Bahia [Goliad] (Warren, 1943:130). A number of Perry's men were veterans of the American victory over the British at New Orleans earlier that year. Some had also participated in the 1812-1813 Gutierrez-Magee expedition, a joint endeavor of Mexican republicans and American adventurers, intent on defeating Spanish royalist outposts in Texas. They captured Nacogdoches, La Bahia, and San Antonio but in August, 1813, were defeated by the Spanish army southwest of San Antonio. The survivors scurried back to Louisiana to plot future invasions of Texas. While Perry's men awaited orders in 1816 to again attack Spanish outposts, they passed their time exploring the land around Galveston Bay for homesites that they expected to receive as their reward from the future Mexican republic (Henson, 1982:26-27).

About this time a Spanish-speaking mapmaker drew the bay and its environs placing a row of "casas" [houses] on the bay-side of "Isla de Culebras" [Snake Island], recognizable as Galveston Island. The modern Galveston channel appears as Puerto de Galveston and has three anchorages noted near the eastern end. The tip of the island was separated and another anchorage appears near Bolivar on the bay side. Punta de Orcoquisas

Mexican republicans. He held letters of marque to prey on Spanish shipping, but he also managed to be paid by the Spanish governor of Texas for reporting incursions of foreigners (Webb, 1952:11:5-6).

In January and February, 1818, generals Antoine Rigau and Charles Lallemant arrived from the United States with a group of Napoleonic exiles seeking a staging area for a grand scheme to rescue the Emperor from St. Helena and put him or his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, formerly ruler of Spain, on a Mexican throne. Lafitte helped them cross the bay and enter the Trinity River in March where they built a fortified camp near present-day Moss Bluff. Lafitte then informed the Spanish governor of their presence. The French drilled and planted crops at Champ d'Azile, but the bad water, mosquitoes, and word that the Spaniards were marching against them drove the exiles back to Lafitte's island in July. Before they could return to the United States, a severe hurricane struck Galveston in September destroying the town of shanties that had developed on the bay shore (Gardien, 1984:241-268). Campeachy, Lafitte's settlement, had between 100 and 200 houses, stores, boarding houses, and a billiard parlour before the storm, according to eyewitnesses (Gulick, 1927:3:232; Franks, 1883; Campbell, 1884).

Sometime between 1817 and May 1820 when Lafitte abandoned the island at the request of the United States, his men had a violent encounter with the visiting Karankawas. The details are few, the story having been passed by word of mouth until recorded by Henderson Yoakum in 1855. Legend says that the pirates kidnapped an Indian woman and in revenge, the natives killed four men. In retaliation, Lafitte's men organized a raid on the Indian camp at Three Trees, the notable landmark on the bay side between present-day Pirate's Cove and Galveston Island State Park. Supposedly 200 pirates attacked 300 Indians with two pieces of artillery. While some of the pirates were wounded by arrows none were killed during the encounter but they killed 30 Karankawas and wounded many others (Yoakum, 1855:1:197). Subsequent historians have copied Yoakum although his numbers seem inflated. The Karankawas, however, did not abandon their annual visits to Galveston Island because later accounts recorded that they endured a second attack by James Long's men in 1820.

Dr. James Long, also a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, became a planter and storekeeper near Natchez after the war. Long and his friends were incensed in 1819 when the United States gave up its tenuous claim to Texas. Many believed that the 1803 Louisiana Purchase included Texas as far west as Matagorda Bay based on La Salle's 1685 occupation. But the Adams-Onís Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 setting the western boundary of the Louisiana Purchase gave Texas to Spain in return for ceding Florida. Merchants interested in the Indian trade in Texas and also sympathetic to the Mexican republicans financed volunteers willing to follow Long to Nacogdoches in June, 1819. The party captured the remote Spanish outpost and set up a Republic of Texas with Long as president. His agents visited Galveston Bay and invited Lafitte to join the movement, but he equivocated and immediately informed the Spanish governor. The poorly supplied Spaniards were unable to start to Nacogdoches until September when

they marched up the old *camino real* to East Texas. By the end of October, they had chased the Long party, including Long's wife, Jane, and American squatters across the Sabine (Gulick, 1927:1:30-31, 34, 36; 2:57, 60, 64, 66).

In February, 1820, James and Jane Long left her sister's home in Alexandria and went to Calcasieu [Lake Charles, Louisiana] where they took a boat to Bolivar Peninsula. A number of Long's followers had preceded him and had constructed a fort on the site of Humbert and Perry's old camp. They named it Las Casas for an 1811 San Antonio republican martyr of that name. They waited on the barren peninsula for supplies and reinforcements from New Orleans in order to launch an attack against the Spaniards down the coast. Lafitte was still on Galveston Island and invited the Longs to dinner; James declined but Jane boarded the boat and was taken to his vessel, an event that she described in detail seventeen years later. His village was already burned, according to Jane, and everyone was leaving. The dinner was "sumptuous" and the guests related many "thrilling adventures." The next day Lafitte sailed away (Gulick, 1927:2:75-76).

According to Jane, Long learned that 100 Karankawas were on the island on July 30, and were holding "war dances." He and 25 men crossed over and went down West Bay where, under cover of darkness, they closed in on the camp. They attacked at midnight and fought hand to hand—Long killed four Indians before breaking his sword. Altogether 40 Karankawas were killed and two boys captured. One lad drowned crossing to Bolivar and later the other was accidentally shot. Two of Long's men were killed and nine wounded by arrows (Gulick, 1927:2:86-88). One participant reminisced in the 1850s saying that Long attacked after the Indians had seized a stranded sloop on the beach and butchered the crew; John McHenry also remembered that there were 200 Indians (Brown, 1853:14:572-584).

This is the last reference to Karankawas on Galveston Island except for Jane Long's claim that they were visible from Bolivar in December 1821, a story that may not be true (Gulick, 1927:2:124). The battered nomads seem to have retreated to the mainland around the Colorado River where between 1822 and 1825 small bands plundered and sometimes killed isolated Anglos settling in the Austin colony. The Anglo Americans finally drove the remaining Karankawas westward until they sought refuge at the mission at La Bahia (Barker, 1969:91-94).

Soon after the Indian brawl, President Long convened his council and declared Las Casas a port of entry and established an admiralty court. The pseudo government also arranged for land bounties for soldiers, civil officers, and settlers and even announced a tariff of 15% ad valorem, naming a colleague collector (Gulick, 1927:2:88). Who was to pay duties on what goods is not revealed!

In October the Mexican exiles in New Orleans and their financial backers named a Hispanic to lead the movement but Long remained in charge of the Anglo American contingent. A lack of supplies and bickering among the various leaders delayed action

against the Spanish for almost a year. In September 1821, word reached the remote peninsula that the Mexican republicans had triumphed and occupied Mexico City (Gulick, 1927:2:94-103).

The Hispanic leaders and some Anglos sailed for Veracruz to go to Mexico City to seek their rewards for loyalty to the cause while Long and 52 followers took a ship to the La Bahia landing. If the Spanish garrison there had not joined the new Mexican Republic, Long would seize it. A tragedy of errors followed. Long captured the outpost, but was in turn arrested and taken to San Antonio because the Texas authorities had taken the oath of loyalty to the new government and he appeared to them as a filibuster. Long was sent to Mexico City where he was killed, supposedly by accident, in April, 1822 (Webb, 1952 2:76).

Expecting to return within a few weeks, Long had left Jane, his small daughter, and several families at Las Casas guarded by a dozen soldiers. But as time passed, all but Jane abandoned Las Casas when winter approached. She gave birth to another daughter at the end of the year and in the spring was rescued by Anglo American settlers who were arriving at Galveston Bay from Louisiana (Webb, 1952:2:76).

Anglo American Settlers in Mexican Texas: Galveston Bay 1822-1835

Galveston Bay became a focus for Anglo American settlement in 1822 and was used primarily as a means for water transportation to and from Texas and New Orleans, the source of supplies and a market for their produce. The latter included animal skins, pecans, bear grease, and wild honey that the settlers acquired in trade with the Couthattas on the Trinity River and also corn, butter, and cotton grown and processed by the newcomers. At first the vessels were small schooners and sloops but by the mid-1830s, steam packets began regular trips from New Orleans.

Galveston Island, the bay, and its major rivers were not included in Stephen F. Austin's colony, but in 1824 the empresario received special permission to add the families already located along Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River and estuary (Barker, 1969:96-97). Thus those living west of Cedar Bayou and north of Clear Creek received titles, but settlers east of Cedar Bayou, on the Trinity River, or the eastern shore of Galveston Bay were under the jurisdiction of Nacogdoches. They were unable to acquire titles until 1834. Galveston Island and what is now Galveston County was forbidden to foreign-born persons as was Bolivar Peninsula and lower Chambers County. The national colonization law of 1824 prohibited settlement by foreigners within 26 miles of the coast except by special permission of the executive (Wallace and Vigness, 1963:48).

Austin's colony centered on the Brazos and extended west to the Colorado River valley, but entry to those rivers proved difficult for sailing vessels having over a four-foot draft.

The Brazos had a dangerous sand bar at its mouth while the approach to the Colorado River was through shallow Matagorda Bay. Moreover, a raft of logs blocked passage on the lower Colorado preventing navigation upstream. Galveston Bay and Buffalo Bayou proved to be the best entrance for incoming settlers and goods.

Stephen F. Austin had inherited the duty to fulfill his father's empresario contract that had been negotiated with the Spanish authorities in the waning days of the empire. Moses Austin, in order to recover from economic difficulties, became a Spanish citizen when he moved from a lead mine in southwestern Virginia to Spanish Missouri in the 1790s. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 made him a citizen of the United States, but hard times following the War of 1812 ruined his mine and banking business near St. Louis. In 1820, a new Spanish policy welcomed foreign entrepreneurs to develop the remote Texas frontier. The old man applied for and received an empresario contract to bring 300 families, supposedly Roman Catholic former residents of Spanish Louisiana disgruntled at being annexed to the United States, to Texas to plant cotton. He died in June 1821 before he could move to Texas and on his deathbed asked that his eldest son use the contract to care for the family. Young Austin arrived in San Antonio only to learn that Mexico had won its independence and that he must go to Mexico City to confirm his father's grant with the new government (Barker, 1969:6-7, 21, 24-25, 28-29, 40).

Word about Mexican independence and the proposed Austin colony stimulated many Mississippi Valley residents to start to Texas in 1822. The effects of the banking Panic of 1819 had caused many honest men to lose their property when creditors demanded immediate payment. Rather than go to jail for debt, they went to Mexican Texas where they were safe from prosecution. Moreover, the Austins had already announced that the land in their grant would cost one-tenth of what vacant land sold for in the United States -12 1/2 cents instead of \$1.25 per acre. The cost of land was further reduced by the Mexican authorities in 1824; each head of a family could claim one league of land (4,428 acres) for fees amounting to about \$192.00, about 4 cents per acre (Barker, 1969:99-101).

The first vessels arriving between January and March, 1822 included three coasting schooners from New Orleans and two family sailboats (Gulick, 1927:2:124-125; 4:1:225-227). One of the schooners, the *Revenge* with perhaps 25 persons on board, appears to have grounded briefly on Red Fish Bar, an oyster reef with only four to five feet of water that stretched across the bay from present day San Leon to Smith Point (Looscan, 1914:196). This event served as a warning to other vessels with drafts over five feet. A family arriving in April in a sailing scow earned money ferrying newcomers from the Gulf to destinations on the San Jacinto (Wittliff, 1966:2-3).

Unlike the problems with the Karankawas on the lower Colorado River, the early residents of the San Jacinto estuary recorded only a single event. A small band identified in a reminiscence as renegade remnants of Karankawas and Tonkawas camped just below Morgan's Point in late 1822 or early 1823. According to the eyewitness who may have

exaggerated and embellished the incident for his descendants, the Indians lured one boatload of unsuspecting newcomers ashore with a white flag and killed all but one man who escaped. The neighbors rallied and crept up on the Indian camp where they saw them eating human flesh. The Anglos killed most of the Indians, and those who escaped never returned. The same individual, however, traded with the peaceful Coushattas who lived above Liberty on the Trinity River (Wittliff, 1966:4-5).

The first of many vessels wrecked on Red Fish Bar was the schooner *Mary* from New Orleans in March 1825 with 36 passengers and their goods. The ship drew 7 feet and even though the captain sent a boat out to sound for a channel, the signal was too late and he went hard aground. The vessel beat on the bottom and the captain ordered barrels of flour and tobacco jettisoned. Nevertheless, the ship was a total loss and the passengers demanded that the captain pay for their property. This disaster inspired Austin to sound and map the bay, and he spent over two weeks in 1826 with a crew of nine in three boats marking safe channels (Barker, 1924:1:1074, 1115-1116, 1285-90). The wreck was still visible to those entering the bay in January, 1828 (Clopper, 1909:51).

Austin's effort was rudimentary, but in 1828 a Mexican naval officer surveyed and sounded the bay for his government. Alexander Thompson, formerly of the United States navy where promotions were slow, spent three months from September through November carefully recording the depths of the passes at the Gulf and at Red Fish Bar plus scattered depths throughout the shallows, the Galveston channel, the San Jacinto estuary, and Buffalo Bayou as far as Harrisburg. He plotted householders whose residences could serve as landmarks, labeled Goose Creek and Double Bayou, but did not sound the seven mouths of the Trinity River delta. Altogether, it was the most accurate and useful map of the bay to that date (Thompson, 1828).

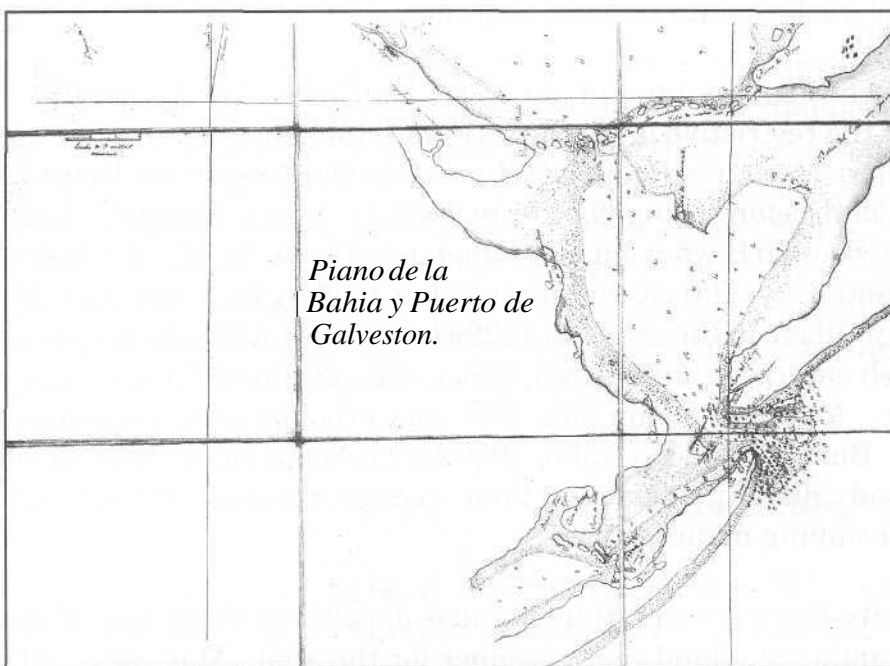


Illustration 7.-Piano de la Bahia y Puerto de Galveston (1828). (Source: Barker Texas History Center)

The first steamboat arrived in Galveston Bay in December, 1830. Henry Austin, a cousin of the empresario, had taken the 86-ton *Ariel* from New York to the Rio Grande the previous year. Finding insufficient business there to pay for the upkeep of the vessel, he steamed to the Brazos River. The ship drew five feet, and when leaving the river for New Orleans in November, the bottom and machinery were damaged on the Brazos bar. Henry managed to get the vessel up Galveston Bay to Buffalo Bayou but found that it could not be repaired and the *Ariel* was still beached and rotting two years later (Hogan, 1934:185-214; Anonymous, 1975:194).

The settlers around the San Jacinto estuary in the 1820s were primarily agrarians. Most were subsistence farmers, some of whom traded with the Coushattas for pecans, wild game, bear grease, and hides, commodities that could be sold in New Orleans. Others were planters who arrived with slaves and capital to grow and process cotton and raise livestock, also sold in Louisiana. A few owned their own boats and became merchants taking agricultural products to New Orleans or the Mexican ports and returning with staple goods (Henson, 1986:6-10).

Geographer Robin W. Doughty noted that the newcomers, both American and European, viewed the Texas environment as *useful* habitat: woodlands were good for building material, prairies for pastures, and game animals for meat and recreational marksmanship. Moreover, wanting their new homeland to resemble where they had come from, they cleared the forest, planted fields, and built homes to subjugate the wilderness. In their efforts to civilize Texas, they imported plants and animals from their previous places of residence. Thus cotton and corn replaced native grass, imported fruit trees displaced native trees, and domestic animals drove out wild creatures (Doughty, 1986:426-433). What these changes meant for Galveston Bay was the beginning of erosion and silting of the waterways from denuded forest and prairie lands that turned to dust and mud before blowing or washing into streams and the bay.

People gathered in small settlements around the bay. Unable to develop Galveston Island as a port because of the restrictive laws, the settlers established several landings on the San Jacinto estuary: Morgan's Point which was earlier known as Rightor's, Hunter's, and Clopper's Point before being bought in 1833 by James Morgan; Lynch's ferry opposite the mouth of Buffalo Bayou; and a landing near Goose Creek. Harrisburg at the junction of Buffalo and Brays Bayou was surveyed in 1826 by its proprietor, John R. Harris, and was the only village in the area. In 1829 Harris was building a steam saw and grist mill, the first such enterprise in the area, which was continued by his partners after his death that year. A second steam saw mill was brought to the Lynchburg neighborhood by David G. Burnet in 1831 (Webb, 1952:1:775; Anonymous, 1975:87-90). Both of these industries had difficulty in keeping their engines in repair so they cannot be considered full-time continuing manufactories.

The residents around Trinity Bay were squatters because of political changes in Mexico City that prevented the naming of a land commissioner for the area. Most were cattle

raisers from southwestern Louisiana and brought their families and animals by land. A few former Lafitte men found the area congenial and were boatmen (Henson and Ladd, 1988:22-26).

In 1830 New York speculators acquired some about-to-expire six-year empresario contracts and sent a number of settlers including some German immigrants to the lower Trinity the following year. Their arrival coincided with a change in policy in Mexico City that sent a garrison to Galveston Bay and other entrances to Texas to enforce the laws against smuggling and to support the newly appointed customs collectors. The Texans had enjoyed a temporary exemption from national tariff duties which expired in 1830, but because of poor communication about the impending change and American agrarians' innate dislike of tariffs, the new order caused trouble. At first the customhouse was at Anahuac to be near the garrison but in early 1832, the government ordered a customhouse, a warehouse, and a barracks for a squad of soldiers near the eastern end of Galveston Island (Henson, 1982:88-89).

Col. Juan Davis Bradburn, one of the Henry Perry-Xavier Mina volunteers who remained in Mexico after 1817, was the commander at Anahuac, the town he created on orders of his superior. He refused to allow the New York company's settlers to receive land because it seemed contrary to a new national law, and he arrested a number of Anglo Texans including William Barret Travis for breaking Mexican law within the fort. While the military could arrest civilians for trespassing on government property, tempers flared and Brazos River volunteers marched against Anahuac in June, 1832. Fortunately for the Texans, a civil war that had been raging since 1830 put republican reformers in control of the national government; the Texans claimed that they opposed Bradburn as the symbol of the just-defeated centralist administration. The reformers closed the customs office and the garrisons left Texas (Henson, 1982:28-118).

The population of Texas and Galveston Bay increased during the 1830s in spite of the political unrest. The bay was a major artery for goods and passengers going to both the San Jacinto and Trinity rivers. In 1834 a second steamboat, the *Cayuga* bought by William P. Harris and Robert Wilson, the former operators of the steam mill, appeared in Galveston Bay. The 96-foot-long sidewheeler drew about five feet and could cross Red Fish Bar with caution. She remained in service for the next two years and marked the beginning of the steamboat era (Epperson- McGinty, 1975:14-17). In 1836 she was joined by the steamboats *Laura* and *Yellowstone* that served during the war against Santa Anna by carrying troops and supplies up the bay.

The Republic of Texas 1836-1845

Trouble began between the Texans and President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna when he ordered Anahuac re-garrisoned in 1835 and the customs collector reinstalled. Once a republican reformer, he reversed his course and became more dictatorial by centralizing

power in Mexico City at the expense of the states. In June Travis led a flotilla from Harrisburg to Anahuac to seize the small garrison after a minor incident resulted in the arrest of a merchant. The Texans called meetings to decide their course and the revolution erupted at Gonzales. Government troops from San Antonio demanded the return of an old cannon loaned to citizens for defense against Indian attack and the Texans refused to give it up.

On March 2, 1836 delegates signed a Texas Declaration of Independence and created a government for a new Republic of Texas. The new officials fled from the Brazos to Harrisburg in March for the convenient transportation system on Galveston Bay. Moreover, President David G. Burnet's home was just east of Lynchburg while that of Vice-president Lorenzo de Zavala, a republican patriot from Yucatan, was across Buffalo Bayou from what became the San Jacinto battleground. In mid-April the new government learned that Santa Anna was crossing the Brazos River at Fort Bend so the officials boarded the steamers for Galveston Island where schooners were anchored in case an escape was necessary.

The astonishing victory on April 21 at the junction of Buffalo Bayou and the San Jacinto River resulted in the capture of President Santa Anna. It was April 26 before the victory message carried by rowboat reached Galveston Island, and it was May 1 before the *Yellowstone* took the president and other dignitaries to the battleground to confirm Gen. Sam Houston's tentative armistice with Santa Anna. The Texas army was sent southwest to follow the remnants of the Mexican army as it retreated from the Brazos River to Victoria and finally the Rio Grande. Santa Anna and the forty captured officers were taken to Galveston on the steamboat. Santa Anna and his three aides were removed to the Brazos in mid-May while the other officers were kept in tents on the island until August when they moved by steamer to Liberty. Some common Mexican soldiers were dispersed to individuals who needed laborers to rebuild their homes and plant crops, while others labored on Fort Travis being built on the eastern tip of Galveston Island, cut wood for the steamboats, or other heavy labor. President Sam Houston released Santa Anna and his aides in November and the rest of the prisoners in April, 1837 (Henson, 1990:189-221).

Communities around the bay changed after the Battle of San Jacinto. Anahuac and Lynchburg remained small transfer depots for goods and passengers heading inland. New Washington on Morgan's Point, a speculative town created by New York investors and their Texas agent, James Morgan, in 1834 never recovered after the Mexican cavalry occupied, ransacked, and burned the store, warehouse, and residences on April 16-20. Santa Anna allowed his troops to do the same at Harrisburg on April 15.

Two new towns, Houston and Galveston, both private ventures, emerged as the leading cities in Texas soon after their founding in 1836 and 1837 because of their convenient locations. Houston developers, A. C. and John K. Allen, New York natives but residents of Nacogdoches since 1832, hired the steamboat *Laura* to make its way up the twisting

and overhung bayou in January, 1837, a first step in proving the city could be a port. Meanwhile, Michael B. Menard and his partners, Thomas F. McKinney and Samuel May Williams, worked to have their 1833 title (acquired from a native-born resident of San Antonio) to the eastern end of the island approved by the new Texas Congress. Many other speculators coveted the strategic site, but finally by inviting their rivals to join their venture and paying the new Republic \$50,000.00, the Galveston City Company was formed (Henson, 1976:94-97).

John James Audubon, who had published the first volume of *The Birds of America* in 1827, visited Galveston Bay and Houston for three weeks in April and May, 1837, hunting specimens to paint for another volume in the series. His vessel anchored in the Galveston channel just off Fort Travis on April 24 where he saw Blue-Winged Teal, Snowy, Purple, and Blue Heron, various species of Sandpipers, and Black-Necked Stilts. A storm struck that evening before he could go ashore, and in the morning he noted "thousands of birds, arrested by the storm in their migration northward, are...hovering around our vessels, and hiding in the grass, and some struggling in the water, completely exhausted (Audubon, 1869:408; Geiser, 1930:16:120)." Excerpts from his notes and journal provide details about the wildlife in 1837:

"April 26. Went ashore...[found]...Blue-Winged Teal...on all the ponds and salt bayous or inlets...where they breed in great numbers; the Black-Necked Stilt, which occurs in small flocks on the brackish ponds...[are]...so shy that it was difficult for us to procure specimens...Black-Headed or Laughing Gulls, now paired, and very nosy, were...seen hovering over the inner ponds of the island, as if in search of food (Geiser, 1930:16:121).

"April 27. We were off at an early hour for the island, two miles distant; we waded nearly all the distance, so very shallow and filled with sandbanks is this famous Bay. The men large fires to keep off the mosquitoes, which were annoying enough for even me. Besides many interesting birds, we found a new species of rattlesnake, with a double row of fangs on each side of its jaws (Audubon, 1869:408-409).

"April 28. We went on a deer hunt on Galveston Island, where these animals are abundant; we saw about twenty-five, and killed four...was delighted to observe the behavior of four Turnstones [migratory, plover-like, but allied to sandpiper], busily engaged in ingeniously searching for food along the seashore (Geiser, 1930:16:121-122).

"April 29. Hundreds of Least Tern are breeding on the island of Galveston Bay. Also, on one of these islands I found eight or ten nests of the Roseate Spoonbill, placed in low cactuses, amid some hundreds of nests belonging to Herons of different species. Snakes are abundant on the island, and live on the eggs of nesting birds, whence the old name for Galveston Island of "Snake Island." The Common Tern is strangely rare just now: only a few are arriving from the west. The Gadwall

Duck is quite abundant on all the inland ponds and streams, as well as on the brackish pools and inlets of the islands and shores of Galveston Bay. Many of them have paired and separated from the other ducks...[other species breeding on Galveston Island included]...the Dusky Duck, the Mallard, the Blue-Winged Teal, the Widgeon, and the Shoveller Duck... [and the young] ...plentiful in the end of June and beginning of July (Geiser, 1930:16:122).

"May 1. The muskrat is the only small quadruped found here, and the common house rat has not reached this part of the world (Geiser, 1930:16:123).

"May 2. ...landed on a point where the Texan garrison is quartered...saw a badly stuffed skin of a grey or black wolf, of the same species I have seen on the Missouri...found a few beautiful flowers, and among them one...I...nicknamed the Texan daisy: and we gathered a number of their seeds...We walked down to the shore bordering a shallow bayou, for the purpose of fishing for prawns (which here grow to a very large size and are extremely abundant) and of catching fish...we saw three spoonbills alight on a sandbar, and...succeeded in getting near enough to kill the finest of the three. Almost at the same instant the back fins of a large fish resembling those of a shark appeared...rammed home a couple of bullets, and lodged them in the body...it floundered about...used its best efforts to get into deeper water...the gun was again charged with balls...the boatswain at a single luck stroke cut off its tail, and having fastened the hook in one of its eyes, we dragged it to the beach...but instead of our prize turning out a shark, it proved to be a sawfish, measuring rather more than twelve feet...from her body we recovered ten small sawfish, all of them alive and wriggling about as soon as they were thrown on the sand. The young were about thirty inches in length, and minute sharp teeth were already formed (Geiser, 1930:16:123-124).

"May 5. Hunted birds over the interior of Galveston Island today. While I was watching some Marsh Hawks that were breeding...! was much surprised to find a large flock of Skimmers alighted, and apparently asleep, on a dry grassy part of the interior...[they]...usually rest much nearer to the shore...[but] ...the tide was much higher than usual [because] of the recent severe gale, and had covered all the sand banks...[where they usually rested.] I found broods of the Spotted Sandpiper, or Tattler, already well grown (Geiser, 1930:16:124-125).

Audubon and his friends sailed up the bay towards Houston, and after entering Buffalo Bayou, "saw an abundance of game." The bayou was "usually sluggish, deep, and bordered on both sides with a strip of woods" about one mile deep. The banks had a gentle slope and the soil appeared good; the prairies in the rear "are cold and generally wet, bored by innumerable cray-fish, destitute of clover, but covered with coarse grass and weeds, with...[an occasional]...grove of timber, rising from a bed of cold, wet clay (Audubon, 1869:411)." Twenty miles up Buffalo Bayou

Audubon found "the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker in abundance, and secured several specimens (Geiser, 1930:16:125)."

On the return voyage to Galveston Island on May 16, Audubon "noticed with great surprise how well adapted the Texas prairies were to the habits of the Black-Throated Bunting...being extremely numerous in every open piece of ground covered by tufts of tall grass." He also noted "that the American Widgeons were all paired...." (Geiser, 1930:16:129).

Five months after Audubon left Texas, a hurricane struck Galveston on October 1, 1837, the first of many storms to devastate the city with high water and wind. Ships anchored in the channel were blown ashore and one destroyed the just-finished three-story McKinney and Williams commission house at the foot of 24th Street and also a new customhouse on the opposite corner. The only structure left undamaged was the 1832 Mexican customhouse which had been converted into a residence where over ninety people sought shelter. Most of the stranded vessels were refloated, but two remained on shore and were used as a temporary customhouse and the other a hotel and later a jail (Hayes, 1974:276-279). A map drawn for the Galveston City Company in 1838 revealed that the storm reopened the cut between the eastern tip of the island and the main portion similar to the 1816 manuscript map. This cut was not visible in the 1828 map made by Alexander Thompson.

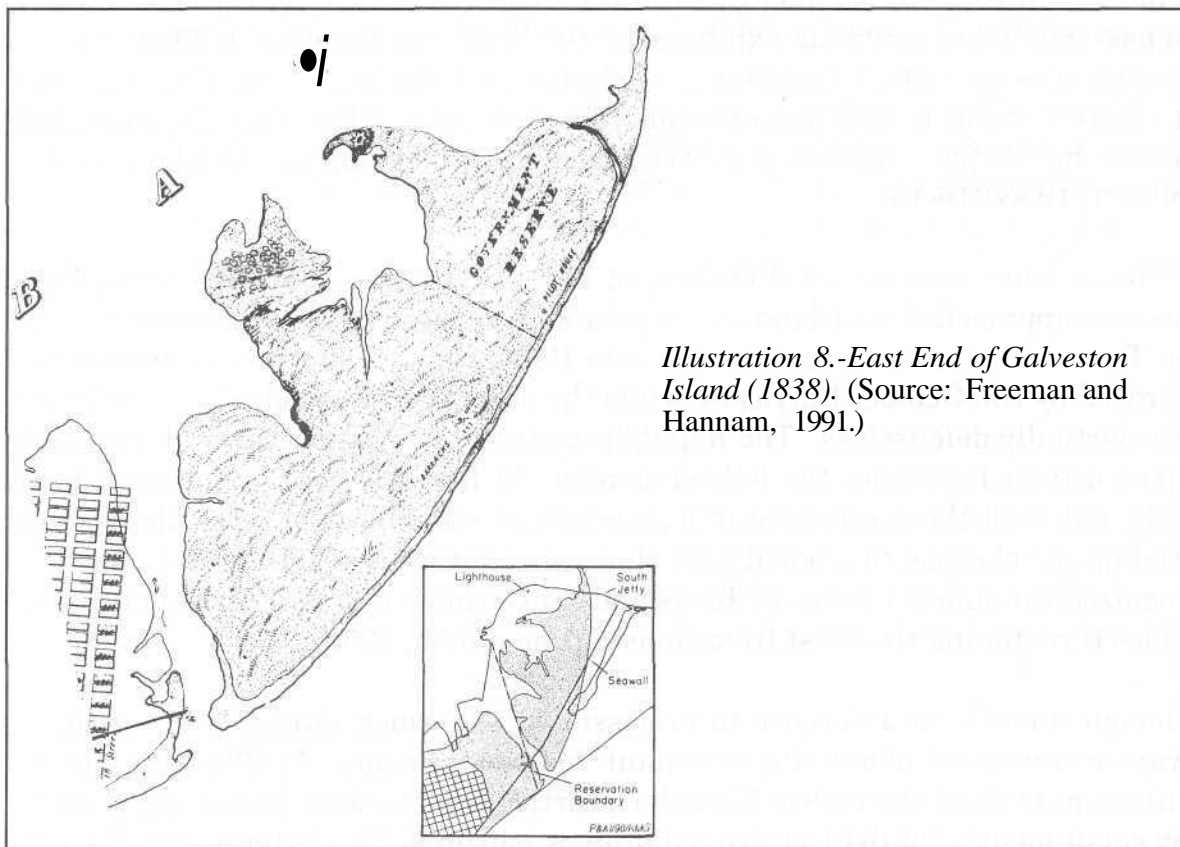


Illustration 8.-East End of Galveston Island (1838). (Source: Freeman and Hannam, 1991.)

Another storm in September, 1842, inundated the town and altered the configuration of Fort Point on the eastern tip, a pattern that continued until the end of the century. A gun platform had floated closer to the shore and the coast guards struggled to reposition the three 18-pounders on higher ground. William Bollaert, a British visitor, believed the shore needed levees. The wind, he said, had blown down the protective sand hills along the gulf and "thus the sea broke through, covering the end of the Island" (Bollaert, 1956:142-44, 151-52).

Galveston and Houston became both destinations and transfer points for people and goods heading inland. Beginning in 1838, small river steamboats made regularly scheduled trips between the island and Houston, usually in about ten hours, while a few larger steamboats plied the Gulf between the island and New Orleans. Comfortable salons, one for the ladies and another for the gentlemen made travel by steamer pleasant. Sailing vessels also continued to bring freight and passengers to the island city where the shallow-draft steamers would load for Houston or the Trinity River. There were no roads leading inland from the shore.

Shallow water caused problems for even the almost flat-bottomed river steamers. In 1838 the *Sam Houston* went aground at Red Fish and spent a day getting off; at dusk it continued towards Morgan's Point where it grounded and the crew worked two days to refloat the vessel (Muir, 1950:238). The main channel of the Trinity River was often just as shallow. In 1844 the steamer *Ellen Franklin* descended the Trinity loaded with cotton and passengers but could not exit because the *Vesta* was aground in 30 inches of water. The crew was unloading its cotton onto flatboats so the boat could slide over the sand bar where the cotton had to be reloaded for Galveston. The *Franklin* prepared to do likewise, but its passengers sensibly changed vessels leaving for the island on the *Vesta* (Bollaert, 1956:316-18).

The Texas Navy also occupied Galveston Bay. In August, 1837, two of the Republic's schooners approached the island with a prize ship followed by Mexican cruisers in pursuit. One Texas schooner managed to slip into Bolivar Roads but went aground and was destroyed by the October hurricane while the other foundered on the outer bar leaving Texas virtually defenseless. The Republic contracted for a number of ships which were delivered from Baltimore the following year. At first the vessels anchored in Bolivar Roads, but with the acquisition of a government steamboat in 1838, the vessels were towed up the channel to a naval yard that was built west of 25th Street. Mexico never recognized the independence of Texas and sent armies into San Antonio twice in 1842 besides threatening the coast from time to time (Webb, 1952:2:750).

Although there is no reference to professional fishermen during this period, visitors always commented about the abundant seafood. Francis C. Sheridan, an English gentleman, praised the turbot [flounder], turtle, mullet, skate [stingray], rcdfish, soles [any small-mouth flat fish], crabs and prawns [shrimp]. The latter were 6-7 inches long and he and a friend gathered 70 pails of shrimp in a seine. He noted that the local

people dreaded the alligator gars, some over 5 feet long, more than alligators (Sheridan, 1954:32, 122-23). A few years later, Dr. Ferdinand von Roemer, a German naturalist, gathered oysters from the decaying hull of a beached naval vessel. The large Galveston oysters were not as good, he said, as the small European variety, but the local shops served them any time of the day-raw, fried, roasted, or stewed (Roemer, 1935:50-51).

Dr. Roemer also visited Morgan's Point where he saw several hundred cattle grazing on the prairie, Morgan's house was on a twenty-foot bluff and his slaves produced corn for the Galveston market. Morgan, like his neighbor across the San Jacinto, Dr. Ashbel Smith, experimented with sugar cane. The German was amazed at the mounds of clam shells "a fathom deep" around the shore and wrongly concluded they had been deposited when the sea level was different (Roemer, 1935:53-62). Dr. Smith, surgeon, planter, and later founder of the Galveston medical school, was always ready for profit, and he had his slaves shovel the shell middens onto vessels for use on Galveston streets (Henson, 1986:44-46).

Many ordinary residents also used the bay to supplement their incomes. Galveston Island was without trees or fresh water and mainlanders sailed their small craft to the island to supply barrels of water and loads of firewood. The steamboats also required fuel and enterprising men could stack cord wood near landings in exchange for money or transportation. Farmers and cattle raisers also found a ready market at the island for fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, and poultry products. Many saved transportation costs by sailing their own boats to Galveston to exchange their produce for store goods.

After nine years as an independent but financially insecure republic, Texas finally was annexed to the United States. Most residents viewed the union as a means for a more stable economy and better defense from the Mexicans and the Indians. Shipping interests hoped that the United States would improve navigation in Galveston Bay dredging, marking, and charting.